

NCA  
VOC FOR IOP/FN  
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5654  
JULIAN K. GORSKI

MARCH 27, 1978

NATO AND THE MBFR TALKS  
(THIRD OF FOUR PART SERIES)

ANNCR:

LEADERS OF THE ATLANTIC PACT NATIONS WILL GATHER FOR A SUMMIT MEETING HERE IN WASHINGTON MAY 30TH. IT'S ASSUMED THAT HIGH ON THE AGENDA WILL BE A REVIEW OF THE EAST-WEST MUTUAL, BALANCED FORCES REDUCTION (MBFR) TALKS IN VIENNA, NOW IN THEIR FIFTH YEAR. WITH A BACKGROUND REPORT HERE IS VOA'S JULIAN GORSKI:

VOICE:

THE FORCE REDUCTION TALKS WERE PROPOSED BY NATO IN 1968. BUT MORE THAN FIVE YEARS PASSED BEFORE THE WARSAW PACT NATIONS ACCEPTED THE INVITATION DESIGNED TO INCREASE SECURITY IN CENTRAL EUROPE. SINCE THEIR INCEPTION, THE MBFR NEGOTIATIONS HAVE BEEN STALLED IN LARGE PART BY THE LACK OF A POSITIVE SOVIET RESPONSE TO WESTERN PROPOSALS. THESE INCLUDE THE WITHDRAWAL FROM EUROPE OF 1,000 AMERICAN NUCLEAR WARHEADS, 90 AIRCRAFT AND MISSILES, AND 29,000 TROOPS IN EXCHANGE FOR A REDUCTION IN SOVIET FORCES OF FIVE ARMY DIVISIONS -- OR A TOTAL OF 55,000 TO 75,000 TROOPS, AND 1,500 TO 1,700 TANKS. THE WESTERN PLAN, ALSO ENVISIONS THE EVENTUAL ESTABLISHMENT OF EQUAL MANPOWER CEILINGS FOR THE FORCES OF THE ALLIES OF THE TWO SUPERPOWERS.

A MAJOR STICKING POINT IS THE FACT THAT LITTLE IS KNOWN ABOUT THE ACTUAL STRENGTH OF THE WARSAW PACT FORCES IN CENTRAL EUROPE. AND LITTLE PROGRESS CAN BE ACHIEVED WITHOUT VERTIFICATION OF THEIR ACTUAL SIZE. THE SOVIET UNION AND ITS EASTERN ALLIES HAVE THUS FAR REFUSED TO RECOGNIZE THIS AS WELL AS THE FACT

THAT IT'S THE PRESENT IMBALANCE IN THEIR FAVOR OF FORCES AND HEAVY WEAPONS WHICH CREATES THE BASIC INSECURITY IN CENTRAL EUROPE.

THE LATEST FIGURES RELEASED BY THE LONDON-BASED INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES SHOW THAT WARSAW PACT TROOPS OUTNUMBER NATO FORCES BY 164,000 MEN. THE WARSAW PACT NATIONS ALSO HAVE NINE AND A HALF THOUSAND MORE TANKS, AND 1,700 MORE AIRCRAFT. FURTHERMORE, THE SOVIETS ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE ACHIEVED STRATEGIC NUCLEAR PARITY, AND ARE GAINING RAPIDLY ON AMERICA'S TACTICAL NUCLEAR STRENGTH.

BUT PERHAPS THE GREATEST SOURCE OF CONCERN TO THE ATLANTIC ALLIANCE IS THE CONTINUING MASSIVE SOVIET BUILDUP OF CONVENTIONAL FORCES IN EUROPE. U.S. DEFENSE SECRETARY HAROLD BROWN REFERRED TO THIS PROBLEM WHEN HE PRESENTED HIS DEFENSE BUDGET TO CONGRESS EARLIER IN THE YEAR. THE BUDGET PROJECTS HIGHER EXPENDITURES TO MODERNIZE THE WEAPONS OF AMERICAN FORCES IN EUROPE AND TO INCREASE THEIR PREPAREDNESS. THE AIM IS CLEARLY DEFENSIVE...TO IMPROVE THE ABILITY OF NATO TO WITHSTAND A SUDDEN ATTACK BY WARSAW PACT FORCES.

AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR NATO WAS SPELLED OUT IN NO UNCERTAIN TERMS BY PRESIDENT CARTER WHEN HE VISITED NATO HEADQUARTERS AT THE TURN OF THE YEAR. THE UNITED STATES, HE SAID, INTENDS TO HELP NATO MAINTAIN MILITARY DETERRENCE "ACROSS THE ENTIRE SPECTRUM" OF NUCLEAR AND CONVENTIONAL FORCES. AT THE SAME TIME, THE PRESIDENT HOPES TO SEE PROGRESS IN THE VIENNA FORCE REDUCTION TALKS IN ORDER TO CORRECT THE EXISTING IMBALANCE IN MANPOWER AND HEAVY EQUIPMENT IN CENTRAL EUROPE.

MR. CARTER REAFFIRMED HIS STAND SOME THREE MONTHS LATER IN A SPEECH DELIVERED IN WINSTON-SALEM, NORTH CAROLINA. WHILE PLEDGING HIS EFFORTS AT REACHING EAST-WEST UNDERSTANDING, THE

PRESIDENT MADE CLEAR THAT THE U.S. WILL COUNTER ANY THREATS TO AMERICA'S ALLIES. AND HE WARNED THE SOVIETS THAT THEY RISK A LOSS OF SUPPORT FOR DETENTE IF THEY DO NOT BEGIN TO RESTRAIN THEIR MILITARY BUILDUP.

DESPITE THE SEEMINGLY INSURMOUNTABLE DIFFICULTIES FACING THE VIENNA NEGOTIATORS, THERE ARE SIGNS OF POSSIBLE PROGRESS IN THE MBFR TALKS. AT NATO'S MINISTERIAL MEETING LAST DECEMBER, U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE CYRUS VANCE SAID IT WAS NATO'S UNANIMOUS OPINION THAT SUCH PROGRESS IS "NOW IN THE INTEREST OF BOTH SIDES." AND BRITISH FOREIGN SECRETARY DAVID OWEN -- WHO HAD VISITED MOSCOW A WEEK EARLIER -- QUOTED PRESIDENT BREZHNEV AS SAYING THAT THE TIME WAS RIPE TO MOVE AHEAD IN THE FORCE REDUCTION TALKS.

MEANWHILE, WESTERN OBSERVERS CONVEY OPTIMISM THAT AN EXCHANGE OF DATA WILL BE CARRIED OUT IN THE NOT TOO DISTANT FUTURE. AND THIS COULD BE THE FIRST STEP TOWARD SOLVING THE VERIFICATION PROBLEM.

JS/RCS